

Genre is only one piece of the puzzle for creating good writing about reading. Student writing must contain all the qualities of good writing that you have taught in writing workshop. Writing workshop does not have a fence around it, and many children don't realize that all they know about writing well must apply to all their writing. Therefore, their book reviews must be just as organized, cohesive, and crafted as any memoir, story, or poem they write. Book reviews should also reflect what they've learned about nonnarrative writing through feature articles, editorials, and reports. The focus of the book review study should be writing, because most of the reading and the mind work about the books has already been done through units in reading workshop, where students used adhesive notes and their reading notebooks to jot notes and save their ideas. They will use the writing process (Murray, 1999) to go from notebooks to projects—that is, they will use their notebooks to find ideas to write about, they'll draft,

with the standard of quality you will expect from your students. hard, or, in the case of some reviews you might find online, not written now, you may need to write these yourself, as published samples may be too have samples of both kinds of book reviews available. Remember that for in the fall and long reviews later in the year. Either way, you will want to then back that study up with longer reviews, or you can teach short reviews cles for your minilesson. You will probably teach short reviews first and the long and short forms and have each available on overhead transparent-denis to say all they need to say. You'll want to collect several examples of and other times a longer examination of the book will be necessary for stu- variety of ways to respond to a book, and sometimes a short review will do

teaching both forms, as you want children to have a from short reviews to longer reviews. I would suggest ably, repeat the study to scaffold children's writing whether to teach short or long book reviews, or prefer- In a book review unit of study, you'll choose readers of a text.

ing some advice to a larger audience of prospective the teacher to prove they have read a text and write- dents understand the difference between writing to stance with which someone writes and makes stu- to prove that he read the text. This changes the reviewer is speaking as an authority on the text, not is to inform prospective readers; therefore, the As I said earlier, the purpose of writing book reviews

Writing Book Reviews

Features of Nonnarrative Writing

clearly stated original idea somewhere in the first paragraph
information to support this idea that is grounded in a text
information organized in a logical progression to advance the idea
paragraphs that chunk information into categories, but transition from one to another to move the reader along
an ending that circles back to the beginning without restating it

Access Book Study

revise, edit, and publish—but the ideas they are looking for will be in their reading notebooks and on their adhesive notes, not necessarily in their writers notebooks.

An important feature of this, and any other genre study, is studying a sample of the genre to ascertain what its particular characteristics are. When students read several reviews or one carefully chosen review, depending on their grade, they generally notice some things that seem to be important in reviews. As students name these things, you can write them on a chart, or you may wish to make two charts from the outset, one for nonnegotiable parts of a book review and one for a menu of possible parts from which to choose (Figure 5-1).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • states title, author, number of pages, and whether there are illustrations (date published, publisher, price) • names genre of book • includes a summary or retelling depending on the length of the review • refers to specifics in the text (could be story elements, events, outcome) • gives the reviewer's opinions and cites examples from the book to support them • states age and kind of reader the book is appropriate for • has all of the qualities of good writing we'd expect in any other genre • considers large ideas that the author seems to examine across several books • makes comparisons to author's other books • makes comparisons to other books of the same genre or to other authors • draws connections to cornerstone literature • uses quotations from the book to support ideas • makes suggestions for improving the book 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refers to awards the author or book has won • suggests the kinds of readers who might like or dislike the book and why • states life questions to consider while reading this book, or themes in the book (Is it honorable to lie to save a life? Is any type of family better than no family?) • comments on the writing or style (lively, lots of dialogue, too many characters) • considers where the book fits in the reader's reading history (I am a different person after this book; I won't remember this book next week.) • mentions if the book adds something new to a field of knowledge or a genre; mentions if there is an inaccuracy in the book • states how the book fits in a series or how it contributes to literature in general • gives constructive criticism • names characters and gives some insights into them • notes something unusual about the text
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FIG. 5-1 *Parts of a Book Review: Students Choose from Possibilities*

Each day, as you plan to teach your minilessons, you'll want to be sure that you are teaching something that is significant, something students can

Day by Day in a Book Review Study

- ⊗ Remember that now students are working in writing workshop and that you are approaching this teaching as you would any genre unit of study in writing. This is what the beginning of the study might look like:
- ⊗ Students study published book reviews to notice and name the features of this genre. The teacher writes these features on a chart.
- ⊗ Students categorize the features to determine which are required in every review and which are negotiable or up to the reviewer's discretion.
- ⊗ The teacher and the class compose a book review together (on a chart or overhead transparency) about a recent read-aloud book the class has shared.
- ⊗ They name the parts they have included and determine what else they may have included or what else they want to add.
- ⊗ Students look through their reading logs to decide individually which of the books they will write about.
- ⊗ After deciding which book they will write about, students find notes, or responses they have written about that book in their readers notebooks.
- ⊗ Students get a copy of the book to refer to while writing.
- ⊗ Students talk with friends to flesh out their ideas and to plan out which parts of the book review they want to include.

- These books take the processes that many writers use and translate them into teaching practice.
- ☐ Calkins, Lucy. *The Art of Teaching Writing*
 - ☐ Flynn, Nick, and Shirley McPhillips. *A Note Slipped Under the Door: Teaching from Poems We Love*
 - ☐ Murray, Donald M. *A Writer Teaches Writing*
 - ☐ Ray, Katie Wood. *Wondrous Words*

Books on Teaching Writing

- If you want to learn more about what writers say they do when writing, you might read some of the following books. They are about writing, not necessarily about teaching writing.
- ☐ Fletcher, Ralph. *What a Writer Needs*
 - ☐ Goldberg, Natalie. *Wild Mind*
 - ☐ Goldberg, Natalie. *Writing Down the Bones*
 - ☐ Lamott, Annie. *Bird by Bird*
 - ☐ Le Guin, Ursula. *Steering the Craft*
 - ☐ Murray, Donald M. *A Writer Teaches Writing*
 - ☐ Murray, Donald M. *Creating a Life in Essay, Story, and Poem*
 - ☐ Provost, Gary. *Make Every Word Count*
 - ☐ Ueland, Brenda. *If You Want to Write*
 - ☐ Zinsser, William. *Inventing the Truth*

Books on Writing You Might Want to Read

Getting Started with Book Reviews

Across Book Study

Across Classrooms

generalize to their reading and writing lives and use over and over again. Minilessons are times for teaching by modeling and demonstrating, not by assigning work to children. So you clearly name your teaching point for every lesson and then decide how best to teach that point. I have written one possible scenario for a three-week unit of study in book reviews, but, of course, this is not the only way to do this study. Although I have provided you with a template, I encourage you to adapt it to the needs of your own students.

DAY 1 On this day, you want students to understand the purpose of a book review is to inform readers and help them decide whether to read this book. Readers read book reviews all the time; in fact, some readers develop sophisticated ways of using book reviews to decide on book selections or ways of interacting with the reviewers through letters. Reviewers include certain things in their reviews to give readers the information they need. Choose a book review (or write one) that closely matches what you expect your students to write. Put it on an overhead transparency; then show and name for the students some of the parts in the review, emphasizing that the reviewer has chosen to include certain things to inform the readers. Then provide book reviews on varying reading levels for students and let them go off in partnerships to study them. After the students have read the reviews and marked off the chunks, they reassemble to make a "parts chart" with the teacher.

DAY 2 Naming the different parts is one way to study how reviews go, but deciding which parts to include in a review must match the reviewer's purpose. For example, if I want to write that the plot of a book closely resembles another book, I may include a longer retelling to prove my point; otherwise, I may only include a summary. If a book has won a Newbery Award, I will mention that and perhaps comment on it, but I won't even bring it up if the book has not won any award. Some information can be tucked in, for example, "Newbery Award-winning author Richard Peck has a new book." (Because one quality of writing I want to teach children is tucking in interesting but not crucial information, I will show them how to do this.)

Today the class will compose a book review together. Ask students to decide on a recent read-aloud book that they'd like to review and to take a stance on that book. Based on that stance, the class will choose which parts they need to include in their review. Deciding which parts to include will depend on what the class wants to say about the book.

After agreeing on which part to include, students will go off in groups to compose the various sections of the review and then reassemble at the end of the class to put them together into a coherent piece.

DAY 3 To write a review, you have to have something compelling to say about a book and some strong feeling about it one way or another. Therefore, you must choose to write about a book that pushes you to say something. Students look through their reading logs or readers notebooks and choose the independent reading or partnership books they will review. They begin to take preliminary notes toward the review, especially recording the nonnegotiable items on the chart.

DAY 4 Before you can write a review, you must know the message that you want to communicate to prospective readers of your book. Students look over the books they plan to write about and decide what their stances or ideas are about their books. They consider what they want to say to prospective readers of the book, and they especially consider how to be original, clear, and fair. They begin to take notes on this and may need to study more mentor texts to see how to state things in a fair and honest way.

DAY 5 Reviews have a certain tone to them: some sound as if they are giving friendly advice, other sound more objective. Students decide the tone they want to use in their reviews and "adopt" some words from the mentor texts to help them do this. In their notebooks, they sketch out the chunks of the review, leaving spaces to fill in specifics from the book.

DAY 6 Writers plan before they write and sometimes use charts to help them. Students skim through their books looking for evidence to support ideas or stances they have taken. They may use an organization chart to help them sketch out the parts of their review, refine their thinking, and choose which examples from the book they will include and which they'll leave out.

DAY 7 When writers draft, they try to use words that will make their drafts sound like the genre they are writing. In book reviews, reviewers use literary words like *narrator*, *plot*, and *imagery*. Students will try to use some of those words as they draft. They will also look between the charts and plans they've made in their notebooks and their mentor texts to help them write the best draft they can.

- DAY 8** Revision strategy 1. (Note: You must assess your students to know which revision strategies to teach, and none of my suggestions here may be appropriate.) Writers reread what they have written to make sure the content matches what they want to say. Today's work includes rereading for their intent (Did I say what I meant to say?), but also revising the actual content of the review (good examples, solid idea or stance, evidence from all parts of the book, clear opinion with support).
- DAY 9** Revision strategy 2. Writers write between the parts of their piece so that each part flows smoothly to the next and each sentence flows smoothly to the next. Teach revising for transitions between the separate parts of the review. You may use mentor texts to show how to do this.
- DAY 10** Revision strategy 3. The parts of the review need to support the stance you are taking. Students need to revise to include all the information they need to prove their point about this book. This might include work on parallelism, so that the parts seem to fit together and each hold their weight.
- DAY 11** Revision strategy 4. Writers meet with others to talk about their drafts. Today the student reviewers meet with other readers of the same book to test out their reviews. They might ask each other: "Have I been fair to this book?" "Did I give too much or too little information?" "Are my examples strong and healthy?" "Would this review help you decide whether to read this book?"
- DAY 12** Revision strategy 5. Unless there is a reason for changing, writers maintain the same tone throughout their writing. Reviews tend to have a certain tone (see Day 5), which students chose when drafting. Be sure your review has maintained the same tone throughout and that you have not changed your tone or opinion in midstream without signaling the change to your reader.
- DAY 13** Readers must be able to read what you have written. Therefore, today's work is editing alone and with partners and using appropriate checklists that reflect what the class has learned so far about written language conventions and grammar. You may want to teach a unit of study on conventions (Angelillo, 2002) early in the year so your children will be adept at using conventions to convey meaning.

DAY 14 Students do some final proofreading to prepare draft for final editing by teacher; they meet with a partner to reflect on the process. Students consider what they've learned about book reviews and think about what other books they might review. They also consider how reviews might help them with book choice in the future, especially if the class begins to build a binder or database of reviews.

DAY 15 Students make plans for sending the review out into the world, reflecting on how they will make book review writing part of their independent reading and writing lives (that is, they are not done with book reviews, they've only just begun to write them).

Sample Minilesson

It is a good idea to follow a plan for your minilessons, which Lucy Calkins has called the "architecture" of a minilesson. This architecture helps you to plan lessons that are clear and cohesive, but any similar plan will do. The crucial thing is to remember that you must teach something—one clear thing—in every lesson, so that your students will walk away knowing something they didn't know before, and they should be able to clearly tell what that thing is. I have written a sample minilesson so you can see how these might go, but I recommend you study Calkins' book, *The Art of Teaching Reading* (2000), for more depth on minilessons.

Day One Minilesson

The purpose of this minilesson is to teach children that book reviews are written to inform potential readers about books and that they have certain features. Before you begin, you will have to find or write a book review that is appropriate for your class and put it on a transparency. Also assemble blank write-on transparencies, markers, and copies of several additional book reviews, which you will distribute to the class after the minilesson. As you will see, this minilesson prepares children for their inquiry into book reviews and shows them that book reviews are a type of writing that people do in the real world. Students are more apt to want to do writing when they know that writing exists outside of school and when the audience consists of someone other than the teacher.

CONNECTING TO THE ONGOING WORK OF THE CLASS Writers, you've been spending weeks and weeks talking and taking notes about the books you've read, and you have learned so much about how people talk and think about books. Now it's time to think about writing some of that thinking down and sending it out into the world to share it. One way people share their thoughts about books in the real world is by writing book reviews, and readers read those reviews to help them decide whether to read a book. For example, I read *The Horn Book* and *The Riverbank Review of Books for Young Readers* to decide which children's books I want to read next. You may notice some grown-ups in your life reading book reviews or even movie reviews to decide if a book is worth reading or a movie worth seeing. In fact, people write reviews to tell others about the books they've read or movies they've seen and to give others advice about whether to read the book or see the movie. So we are going to study how to write book reviews and today we'll begin a unit of study on that.

THE TEACHING PART One thing writers do is they study the kind of writing they are going to do to learn about it. So let's look at a book review together, and we'll name some of the things the reviewer included in his review. [Put transparency on overhead projector and read the review to the class.]

I noticed that this reviewer told us right away that this book was the newest book by a famous author. So that makes me think that one thing I might put in a book review is whether the author was well known or if this was a first book. [Underline that part of the review; then on write-on transparency, begin list of "features of a book review."] I also noticed that this reviewer tells us right away that this book is not as exciting as other books by this author. So on my list of features of a book review, I can write that a reviewer compares this book to other books by the same author. [Add that to the list.] So I'm beginning to get an idea of some of the things a reviewer might include in a review.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT What I would like you to do right now is to read this over and turn to your partner and say something else you notice the reviewer included in this review. [Listen to some of the children's conversations for two or three minutes.]

OFF YOU GO Let me tell you some of the things I heard. I heard some people say that the book review has the title of the book, the publisher's

I heard another partnership say that the reviewer told a little about the plot, but not enough to spoil the story for us if we decide to read the book. I'll add that to our list, too. So today I'm going to give you some copies of book reviews. I'd like you to read the one I give you and your partner, and then think about what features you notice in the book review. Talk about it with your partner, and write your ideas down in your writers notebook. Then we'll come together to share what we've found and to add your findings to our list of features. Any questions? Okay, off you go.

Sending Their Book Reviews into the School Community

Because the purpose of book reviews is to inform (or warn) others about a text, it is authentic to create ways for student book reviews to reach a larger audience. Having an audience for their writing raises the stakes for children; somehow if they think that teachers are the only ones reading their writing, it is not as important to them. But book reviews can be a wonderful way to make children see that their writing can make a difference to others.

Ways to Send Students' Book Reviews into the Larger Community of Readers

- ⑥ Keep a class file of reviews as children write them, organized and cross-referenced by book, author, or genre; teach children how to use it and why they should use it.
- ⑥ Insert student reviews inside the front covers of books in the classroom library or enter them on a class or schoolwide database.
- ⑥ Teach students how readers use book reviews to help them choose books; ask them to cite which reviews helped them make choices.
- ⑥ Accumulate different student reviews of the same book, especially opposing views; discuss the reviews with readers.
- ⑥ Put student reviews on the Internet and check regularly for feedback.
- ⑥ Include reviews from magazines in class file or binder.
- ⑥ Build in time for students to respond to reviewers in writing or in conversation.

Experiences like these let children know that writing for real reasons is not only satisfying, it's enjoyable and meaningful. Children who have written book reviews and whose reviews have become part of the larger school literacy community understand that readers write about books to communicate truths to others. It lifts writing about reading to a privilege and a responsibility for student readers. Which ever genres of writing about reading you choose to teach, let children see for themselves that this type of writing can make a difference to them as readers, making wise book choices, and as writers, seeing their writing influence their peers. Children do not

Summary

When fourth-grade students at Village School in Syosset wrote book reviews, they entered them into the library's database. How exciting it was for them to know that their book reviews were available for anyone in the school to read. How supportive it was when students said or wrote to a reviewer that his review had made them choose a book or that the review was accurate and fair. How rewarding it was for student reviewers when other children asked the librarian to see the latest student reviews she had received or when they went to the database to read all the reviews before taking a book home (Figure 5-2).

- ④ Ask students to reflect on book choices they make as a result of reviews and describe to what extent the reviews influenced them.
- ④ Teach students to reflect on which reviewers they feel they can "trust" for advice that fits their reading experience and on times when the review did not match their experience with the book.
- ④ Start a book review club, where students write reviews of books they've read together.
- ④ Include discussion of reviews of shared texts, such as read-aloud books.
- ④ Make copies of reviews to trade with other classes or add to school library database.
- ④ Make a class chart of quotes from reviews; make book jackets with quotes on them.
- ④ Celebrate by making laminated bookmarks with quotations from students' book reviews and inserting them in the books.